

THE DEATH-WATCH.

DIALOGUES UPON SPIRITS,
OR, A CURIOUS, INTERESTING, AND ENTERTAINING
DISQUISITION
ON THE
IMPORTANT QUESTION
RELATING TO THE REAL APPEARANCE OF
DEPARTED SOULS,
And their Power of making their
SECOND APPEARANCE IN THE WORLD.

Containing also, among other singular Opinions; a clear Discussion of the various unsettled Notions, ancient and modern, relating to their Power and Possibility of revisiting this World, to warn their Friends, or perform such other Acts, as the inscrutable Ways of Providence may direct. The whole exemplified with various Examples, verified by Persons of Credibility.

ALSO,

Several Stories of chimerical Impressions—Wonderful Effects of Fear—Artful Impostures—Somnambulism—and the strange Effects of the Imagination in hypochondriac Persons.

BY A COUNTRY CLERGYMAN.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE good intention with which the following work is written, it is hoped will be accepted as some apology for its defects; while the universality of a slavish fear in the minds of children, and its disagreeable consequences, must appear as powerful arguments in favour of committing it to the press, and of soliciting the candour of the public for its reception.

But to the tender parent, and those who have children under their care, the author feels an anxious wish that this little work may prove acceptable; and trusts the design with which it is undertaken may recommend it to their notice; not as a perfect work, but as one professedly designed for the use and benefit of children, in assisting them to banish the tales of the nursery,

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by

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by pointing out their absurdity, and opening the way to reason and reflection.

For any inaccuracies in the following pages, that have escaped the pen of the author, she entreats the indulgence of the public, and hopes her distance from the press, and the important duties wherein she is engaged, will plead some excuse.

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INTRODUCTION.

ADDRESSED TO THE CHILDREN FOR WHOSE
BENEFIT THE FOLLOWING SHEETS WERE
WRITTEN.

DEAR CHILDREN,

IN order to free your minds
from the slavish fears of ignorance and
superstition, I am desirous to lay before
you the following sheets, which I beg
you will read with attention in the
moments of still reasoning and reflec-
tion.

But as they contain similar senti-
ments to those personally addressed to
you, when you have done me the plea-
sure

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sure of your implicit confidence, I think it necessary to acquaint you with the motives which induced me to lay them before you in print.

First, I have frequently observed a too lively sense of fear attend these subjects, when general, to permit you the free use of your reason, and leave you quite at liberty to judge for yourselves.

Secondly; It cannot be supposed that the mind of each individual, will, at the same period of time, be best disposed for the reception of arguments against their too favourite topic of conversation.

But by the following sentiments being in your possession, it will be in your power to apply to them, in those moments when your minds are most open to conviction, and most anxious for

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for information. Not when you are agitated by fear, or misled by false impressions from the recent tale,

- While well attested and as well believ'd,
- Heard solemn, goes the goblin-story round;
- Till superstitious horror creeps o'er all,

THOMSON.

But will not some be apt to say with Shenstone;

• Whence comes it that narratives of this kind have at any time been given, by persons of veracity, of judgment, and of learning? Men neither liable to be deceived themselves, nor to be suspected of any inclination to deceive others, though it were their interest; nor who could be supposed to have any interest in it, even though it were their inclination.

This question I presume, stated as above, will be found to convey your ideas,

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ideas, only expressed with more propriety; and this supposition naturally leads me to another, which is, that a quotation from the same author in reply, will prove agreeable.

‘ Here seems a further explanation wanting than what can be drawn from superstition.

‘ I go upon a supposition, that the relations themselves were false. For as to the arguments sometimes used in this case, that had there been no true shilling there had been no counterfeit, it seems wholly a piece of sophistry. The true shilling here, should mean the living person; and the counterfeit resemblance, the posthumous figure of him, that either strikes our senses, or our imagination.

‘ Supposing no ghost then ever appeared,

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peared, is it a consequence that no man could ever imagine that they saw the figure of a person deceased? Surely those, who say this, little know the force, the caprice, or the defects of the imagination.

• Persons under the influence of terror, or in the deliria of a fever, or in a fit of lunacy, or ever walking in their sleep, have had their brain as deeply impressed with chimerical representations as they could possibly have been, had these representations struck their senses.

• How difficult then must it be to undeceive a person as to objects thus imprinted? Imprinted absolutely with the same force as their eyes themselves could have pourtrayed them! And how many persons must there needs be, who could never be undeceived at all!

• Some

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‘ Some of these causes might not improbably have given rise to the notion of apparitions; and when the notion had been once promulgated, it had a natural tendency to produce more instances. The gloom of night, that was productive of terror, would be naturally productive of apparitions. The event confirmed it.

‘ The passion of grief for a departed friend, or horror for a murdered enemy, of remorse for a wronged testator, the love of a mistress killed by inconstancy, of gratitude to a wife for long fidelity, of desire to be reconciled to one who died at variance, of impatience to vindicate what was falsely construed, of propensity to consult with an adviser, that is lost.—The more faint as well as the more powerful passions,

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sions, when bearing relation to a person deceased, have often, I fancy, with concurrent circumstances, been sufficient to exhibit the dead to the living.

‘ But what is more, there seems no other account that is adequate to the case as I have stated it. Allow this, and you have at once a reason, why the most upright may have published a falsehood, and the most judicious, confirmed an absurdity.’

Thus far Shenstone, whose sentiments on this subject I was unacquainted with at the time the following work was delivered for the press, but having met with them since, and wishing you to see them, I present them in this introductory address; to which I now beg leave to add, that when the following dialogues were written, they were not intended to have had annexed

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ed to them any the most distant reference to the writer, or any publication of hers, that could have enabled you to trace YOUR FRIEND in



THE AUTHOR.

DIA-

[1]

DIALOGUE I.

CAROLINE AND MATILDA.

Caroline.

INDEED, my dear Matilda, it gives me much uneasiness to see you enter into such foolish stories of ghosts and apparitions, which you listen to with such marked attention, that I cannot doubt your believing they are all true.

Matilda.

I am much obliged to you, my good Caroline, and very sorry that you will not depend upon the truth of any stories of spirits or apparitions; which I own, I, for my part, take great delight in hearing, and am always disappointed when you laugh at them; besides, I wonder much at your cruelty in being so highly entertained with the fears of your companions.

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Caro-

DIALOGUE I.

Caroline.

Pray you, my Matilda, believe me, when I assure you my entertainment does not arise from a bad disposition, or any gratification that is not perfectly inoffensive.

Matilda.

I know not how to think that possible. Although I never knew you cruel in any other particular, yet, I cannot but think you so, when you laugh at your companions, and the most fearful tales they relate.

Caroline.

Yes; and you will laugh with me, when your fears are removed, and you are able to judge of their absurdity.

Matilda.

I have great reason to wish I could think less about them, for I should not then be afraid, if in the dark, nor be alarmed at any little accident, as I have many times been.

Caroline.

Yes, I observed you a few evenings since, when the candle was unexpectedly removed, and your eye had, I imagine, a very imperfect view of a shadow



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shadow against the side of the room where we were sitting; you started at the movement of this shadow, as much as you could have done had it been any thing that could really have injured you: but I am glad you will acknowledge your fears are troublesome, and that you have reason to wish yourself freed from them.

But I beg you tell me sincerely, is not your sleep frequently disturbed when you have been listening to the hideous stories of your acquaintance?

Matilda.

So much so, that I am sure to be troubled in my dreams, if I sleep; but my fears many times banish sleep, and then you know not how much I suffer; I tremble, and am so afraid.

Caroline.

You never think what injustice you are guilty of to yourself, in thus giving way to such foolish apprehensions, without ever consulting your reason. But I am of Addison's opinion, who says, 'I look upon a sound imagination as the greatest blessing of life, next to a clear judgment, and a good conscience.'

Now the question is, whether you can think you are in possession of this great blessing, a sound imagination?

B 2

Ma-

Matilda.

No, by no means ; if a sound imagination keeps people from being afraid.

Caroline.

I am far from asserting that it will keep people from being afraid, if there be any reasonable cause of fear. But without this valuable blessing, you are subject to constant alarm, and all that slavish apprehension so well described by the author I have lately quoted, in the Spectator, No. 12, where he says,

‘ I remember last winter there were several young girls of the neighbourhood sitting about the fire with my landlady’s daughters, and telling stories of spirits and apparitions. Upon my opening the door, the young women broke off their discourse, but my landlady’s daughters telling them it was nobody but the gentleman (for that is the name I go by in the neighbourhood, as well as the family) they went on without minding me. I seated myself by the candle that stood on a table at one end of the room ; and pretending to read a book that I took out of my pocket, heard several dreadful stories of ghosts as pale as ashes that had stood at the feet of a bed, or walked over a churchyard by moonlight : and of others that had been

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conjured into the Red-sea, for disturbing people's rest, and drawing their curtains at midnight, with many other old women's fables of the like nature. As one spirit raised another, I observed that at the end of every story the whole company closed their ranks, and crouded about the fire. I took notice in particular of a little boy, who was so attentive to every story, that I am mistaken if he ventures to go to bed by himself this twelve-month.

The subject is continued; but what is necessary I think I have given you, and I do not wish to trouble you with more; only I beg you to observe if there had been real cause for fear, the children must have been the last to discover it, as a man of understanding and experience must have seen the danger much quicker than they could possibly be supposed to do; but as they were only guided by their fear, and not their reason, they of course hurt that sound imagination so much to be wished for. But I beg to know your opinion on the subject?

Matilda.

My opinion is, that I should have been as much frightened as any of the company.

Caroline.

And you will own, with as little reason. Yet

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I wish

I wish to know what you think you have to fear on those occasions?

Matilda.

Well, I will tell you.—Now, had I been that little boy, when I had got to bed, I should have remembered all that had been said of the ghosts, and I should have expected to have seen them immediately, as they had been described, and have reflected upon the visit I expected, until I had trembled with horror at the appearance they would make.

Caroline.

But you do not think they would visit you without any cause? You, no doubt, expect they have business of importance, something of consequence to communicate?

Matilda.

O! no, that would be ten times worse; and I should almost die with fear, if I thought they would address me.

But I do not believe they can speak, for I never heard they could; and as to business, I cannot remember hearing they ever came about any business whatever.

Caroline.

Upon my word, Matilda, you have paid those
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imaginary beings a fine compliment, in supposing they are sent into this world again, without any power to do good; and according to your ideas, only permitted to play tricks, make unaccountable noises, and disturb whole families of poor innocent people, who have neither any way injured them, nor can possibly discover why they are to be thus tormented.

From all which I conclude, you and your companions are of opinion, they are sent in those horrid shapes for no other reason than to frighten people, to make them tremble, or run away; or perhaps do them great injury, as these strange accounts may do you, if not timely prevented by better information.

Matilda.

Indeed it seems very odd that those they visit and torment should not know why they are sent, as they might then be supposed to be of some use.

Caroline.

Certainly, in this you judge right; for without some wise end was answered by their revisit to earth, we cannot imagine such cruelty in the merciful Disposer of all events, as you, I dare say, would not be guilty of, even to the little girl that your mother permits you to send of your errands; for I am much mistaken in your disposition, if you

would not be ashamed to send the child, particularly if unable to speak, for no other purpose than to be stared at, or to frighten people.

Matilda.

I hope never to be guilty of such cruelty, as you know I could not answer to my kind mother for behaviour like this. Besides, they must be very foolish who permitted me to do so; and if I was so very unreasonable in my requests, I hope the little girl would have more sense than obey my commands.

Caroline.

Then you really think those commissions would be unreasonable and unjust?

Matilda.

I am sure they would, except they were in jest, and only intended for a little innocent diversion.

Caroline.

Respecting this innocent kind of sport, there is a good moral to be drawn from the fable of

The Boys and the Frogs,

Which Esop begins thus. ‘On the margin of a large lake, which was inhabited by a great number of frogs, a company of boys happened to be at play, their diversion was duck and drake; and whole

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whole vollies of stones were thrown into the water, to the great annoyance and danger of the poor terrified frogs. At length one of the most hardy, lifting up his head above the surface of the lake; "Ah, dear children," said he, "why will you learn so soon the cruel practices of your race? Consider, I beseech you, that though this may be sport to you, it is death to us."

Matilda.

I perfectly understand the meaning of this fable; and I think it as possible for some persons to die with fear, as the frogs by being pelted with stones.

But, you know, no one could send in sport, and for the sake of a little innocent diversion, a child who could not speak, and by that means explain the occasion of her visit; for then it would be hardhearted, and unkind.

Caroline.

But you do not see any impropriety in imagining the dead are to be disturbed for no better purpose?

Matilda.

Indeed that is what I have never thought of before; and now you mention it, I am very much surprised.

Caroline.

I am glad to see you are in a humour for reflection. I cannot but wish to know how you reconcile that part of Scripture, which, speaking of the grave, says, 'There the wicked cease from troubling; there the weary are at rest.'

Matilda.

Indeed, my good Caroline, I cannot account for it; and all you say on the subject is so new to me, that I must beg to be excused giving an answer, until the next time we meet, when I shall be happy if you will resume this conversation.

Caroline.

I shall most certainly remember that you do not see any unkindness in the dead being disturbed, and sent into this world without power to do any good, merely to frighten people. Indeed, my Matilda, you must excuse me, but I cannot but laugh at the employ you assign them.

Matilda.

Nay, now you go too far.

Caroline.

Not in the least, my dear Matilda; for I think this is a mighty clever way of escaping a good drub-

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drubbing, which, if they were mortal, I am sure they would deserve, for such unaccountable tricks, which, you must own, shew a strange propensity to mischief.

Matilda.

But you know they may have the power of speaking.

Caroline.

Suppose they have, what then?

Matilda.

Nay, I know not that they would be much better for that liberty; for I am certain, very few people, if any, would have the courage to answer them; and I think I should die with fear, was such a circumstance to happen to me.

Caroline.

And do you imagine the gentle spirit of a good person could be unfeeling to the horrors they saw their presence created, in those they visited when they returned to earth?

Matilda.

No, I think that impossible.

Caroline.

If not, we must conclude, when the good are sent, they must feel it as a punishment; and we can only consider it as a diversion to the bad, expressly contrary to Scripture, which says, 'there the wicked cease from troubling.' And it would be an act of the greatest cruelty to the good, who could not enjoy this buffoonery when they observed the horror it created.

Matilda.

I confess this is some reason for your being so merry at our fears; as it would be unjust to send the *good*, and the *bad* are expressly declared to rest in the grave.

Caroline.

I cannot help desiring to see you freed from such flavish fears, which I observe hurts your health, and injures your rest and peace of mind; therefore beg your attention on this subject whenever it occurs.

Matilda.

You may depend upon it, as I am sensible my fears can no way affect you; and of course, you can only want me to be freed from such apprehensions on my own account.

Caro-

Caroline.

Then, in our next conversation, we will carry the subject further, and I may perhaps tell you a tale myself.

Matilda.

I shall be glad to hear one from you ; but if it be frightful, you will not believe it, and will only make game of the person you had it from.

Caroline.

That you will be the better able to judge of, when I have an opportunity to relate the account.

DIA-

DIALOGUE II.

CAROLINE, MATILDA, AND HENRIETTA.

Matilda.

WHEN we were parting the other evening, my dear Caroline, you promised to tell me a story when you had an opportunity, and I hope you will excuse my having brought Henrietta to hear it; as she is as fond of tales of ghosts as myself; but she is not like you, for she believes them.

Caroline.

I am much obliged to you and Henrietta, and will do myself the pleasure to relate the story I have mentioned.

Ma-

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Matilda.

But what can you say, my good Caroline, to those tales, many of which I have been told by people, whose veracity I never heard called in question. Nay, I have known even you say they were people of undoubted character as to truth?

Caroline.

I acknowledge the justice of your remarks, and can assure you, what I mean to relate is what really happened to a lady I am well acquainted with, and whose authority I can no more doubt, than many you allude to; therefore I beg your attention to every part of my relation.

Henrietta.

You may depend upon it.

Matilda.

I am very impatient to hear it.

Caroline.

The lady is one that I am well acquainted with; and the circumstance happened when she was about fourteen years of age.

She went upon a visit to a family at some distance from her home; she slept in a room alone;
but

but in the night was awakened by a noise near her, which, upon listening to, she thought to be dreadful groans. She had not long attended to this alarming circumstance, when she heard, what she supposed to be the apparition of a lady, dressed in silk, walking about the room, who at last, as she thought, came and undrew the curtains of her bed, which she observed was several times repeated; while she, in the utmost agony and terror, covered herself with the bed-clothes, and was half dead with fear and apprehension.

Matilda.

O! my dear Caroline, you make me almost tremble at the thoughts of the poor young lady's situation. What did she do?

Caroline.

What I wish you to do, if ever in a similar situation; but I hope you would not suffer so long from fear, before you convinced yourself as to the reality of what you heard. As to the lady in question, after laying some time in the state I have informed you, and expecting every moment the ghost would take from her the bedclothes under which she had endeavoured to conceal herself; she began to consider that she was not conscious of having ever injured any one, and of course the spirit (for such she concluded it was) would not injure

injure her, if she could have courage, and venture to take a look. In consequence of which resolution, she, with a great degree of timidity, raised her head above the bedclothes, when, to her no small satisfaction, she perceived it was beginning to be daylight. Emboldened by this discovery, she looked about her; and to her great consolation she found out the source of all her apprehensions, which arose from a very common and trifling incident.

Matilda.

Oh! lo! then it was not a ghost at last.

Caroline.

So like one.—But you shall hear.—The house was an old one, and the window opened, as you have seen many, with a small iron fastening. This had not been properly attended to the evening before, and in the night there came on a violent storm of rain and wind. The curtains of the bed, as is common, ran on iron rods, with brass rings, and the bed was placed rather near the window, which, from the violence of the wind, had been blown open; by which means the curtains were exposed to the fury of the storm, which blew them backward and forward with great violence, and was what she thought the ghost had been particularly engaged with. She soon observed their fluttering

tering against the paper of the room, when agitated by the wind, was what she concluded to be the rustling of silks, while the dropping of the rain on the lead under the window, was what her terrified imagination converted into the noise of a lady's shoe heels, walking over the floor : and the noise the wind made in different parts of the old building, sounded to her, during her panic fear, as so many screams and groans. Finding how much she had imposed upon herself, by her misled fears and deceived imagination, she arose, and shut the window, which put a stop to the grand cause of all that had so terrified her. But so great had been her agitation, that she could not sufficiently collect herself, or compose her mind, so as to admit of any more rest ; and such was her assurance of the reality of what she supposed was passing, and so deep the impression of horror which had seized her mind, that she says, had she not fortunately had resolution enough to look up, but had laid until some of the family had come into her chamber and shut the window, before she had perceived the effects of its being open, nothing could have persuaded her at the time, but that there really was something supernatural in the room.

Now only think, my dear girl, how many tales, to which you have listened with the utmost attention, may have no better foundation than the one I have now told you ; and yet the people may be
as

as innocent of any intentional falsehood as yourself, but are deceived from want of resolution to seek a little further into the cause of their alarm; in which they would be amply rewarded for their trouble, by a present cessation from their painful fears, and a future bar to their having their minds misled by false appearances.

Henrietta.

We are much obliged to you for this account; and I am glad the young lady had the courage to look up, and see the cause of all her apprehensions.

Caroline.

And so am I, for your sakes as well as her own. But I fear Matilda is a little disappointed at their being no ghost in it; only a supposed one.

Matilda.

I am sure, had it been me, I should have made it one; for, in the first place, I could not have dared to look up; and in the next, I should not have had so much more courage from its being light: for though spirits are generally represented as coming in the dark, yet, as the light seems necessary to our perceiving them, I should have only made myself more sure of seeing the ghost I imagined so near me.

Caro-

Caroline.

But do you not think this would have done most admirably for a story of an apparition?

Henrietta.

Yes, that I am certain it would, and have been as firmly believed as any of the tales we have in circulation.

Matilda.

Well, as to that, there was great reason to imagine it was a ghost.

Caroline.

As to the strength of the reason on this occasion, we will, if you please, be silent; but as to the strength of the fear, it cannot be doubted; and that passion is too powerful for either reason or any other cause to subdue; therefore more particularly contributes to make people deceive themselves, as well as other people, by their strange, though innocent relation; and thus I account for, and answer your question at the beginning of this dialogue.

DIA-

DIALOGUE III.

CAROLINE, HENRIETTA, AND MATILDA.

Henrietta.

WELL, my good friend, I have reflected much upon the subject of people coming again into this world, after they have been removed by death.

Caroline.

I am glad you have ; and, for my part, I confess I think it a foolish business, as I cannot see why they should be removed merely to be sent back so long a journey. Now I think they had better stay here, and be excused all that trouble.

Matilda.

You never will be serious on this subject, Caroline ?

Caro.

Caroline.

How, my dear Matilda, can you say so, when you know I told you a very serious tale of a ghost the last time I had the pleasure of seeing Henrietta and you together.

Matilda.

Ah, but that was only to prove how much people might be mistaken, when they imagined they heard a ghost.

Caroline.

The best thing that could possibly be proved to you; for your fears and apprehensions are sufficient to create them.

Matilda.

I freely acknowledge this, and would give any thing I never had heard of ghosts; for then you know I should not be afraid.

Henrietta.

Nor I neither; and yet I am as fearful as you can imagine, after hearing my acquaintance tell of frightful appearances, which they are told were seen in such and such places.

Caro-

Caroline.

But do not you ladies think it more likely that these people should be mistaken, than that the dead should be disturbed?

Matilda.

No, that I cannot suppose; for this reason: I have heard many have really appeared to some of their most intimate acquaintance, and that they have seen them too near to admit of any mistake in their persons, which were well known to them; and I have heard them likewise observe, that they could not but know them from their clothes, being exactly the same they used to wear when living, and put on precisely in the same manner.

Henrietta.

I have heard so many times, and I own I never know how to think they can be mistaken when they mention such circumstances; for most certainly, Caroline, it is the best proof they can give that they are not deceived by their fears or imagination.

Caroline.

And are you, likewise, of that opinion, Henrietta; if so, I know not how far I shall be able

to convince you of the absurdity of those extravagant relations. But you will do me the justice to believe I shall neither enter into, nor continue, this kind of conversation, but with a view of freeing you from a slavish fear, I observe you have permitted to take place in your minds, though you are sometimes ashamed to acknowledge it; as was your companion the other night, when she requested to change her bed, and sleep in another room, though she was so much ashamed of her fears, as to beg to be excused declaring them.

Henrietta.

Your kind intention merits our acknowledgments.

Matilda.

Yes, and our particular observation to what you say on this subject; and should you free us of our fears, it will be a lasting advantage.

Caroline.

That is my wish; as you may then, and not till then, taste the blessings I have already described as belonging to a sound imagination.

Henrietta.

We will be all attention.

Caro-

Caroline.

Then permit me to ask you ladies a few questions. As you are of opinion the body quits the grave on those occasional visits; pray, tell me, how do you imagine them capable of removing the mass of earth that is universally thrown over every poor helpless corse? And when entombed, how do they remove the stones, &c. which must be in their way? Would not those actions speak them stronger than when alive? And I should be glad to know how they contrive to leave all so like what it was before they took their nightly excursions, that there is no discovering the difference? Can you account for these phenomena, Matilda?

Matilda.

I can no otherwise account for there not being any confusion of this sort, than by supposing that the body is not raised from the grave, but remains there in quiet, and only the spirit revisits earth.

Henrietta.

Nay, but it must be the body with the spirit, if they do the things they tell us of. For you know a spirit could not remove great substances from their places.

C

Caro.

Caroline.

No, nor small substances neither ; no more than your shadow could remove any substance,

Matilda.

But though we cannot account for these things, yet, Caroline, you must own that is no proof of their impossibility.

Caroline.

By no means ; yet I think it proof enough to me to disbelieve what my reason tells me is so very absurd.

Henrietta.

Indeed, Caroline, you are now too harsh in your sentiments. But I hope you will excuse me, if I still believe the body comes again after death ; though I cannot tell how it disengages itself from the earth.

Caroline.

Nor, I presume, how it returns again to its habitation there.

Henrietta.

No, that I grant I am equally at a loss to account for. But let us have your opinion.

Caro-

Caroline.

Pardon me, my dear Henrietta, while I inquire what is your idea of death. Do you think it is a separation of the soul from the body?

Henrietta,

Yes, most undoubtedly.

Caroline.

Then you certainly have not reflected upon what you have just said: for if the body be reunited with the soul, it must of course die every time they are separated; therefore every time the body returns to its gloomy mansion, the grave.

Matilda.

I grant with you, Henrietta, that death is a separation of the soul and body; but then we must own, if they were reunited to make their appearance upon earth, death must of course follow by their separation.

Caroline.

Most certainly; and do you not think this would be ascribing cruelty and injustice to a wise and merciful Creator?

Matilda.

I think it would; and therefore cannot believe any thing so contrary to reason and common sense. But you know, Caroline, we are not acquainted with the place where the spirit resides, and therefore not able to judge from whence it comes.

Caroline.

This, I grant you, answers every difficulty relative to their reunion, by your giving up that thought; and I flatter myself you see the impossibility or absurdity of such a supposition.

Henrietta.

But do you indeed, Caroline, think, that after death they never rise again.

Caroline.

We are expressly told, that it is appointed to all men *once* to die, and after death to come to judgment. In this you may observe they are only appointed once to die, and the only return from the grave we know of is the resurrection to life eternal. This is what is called by Young, man's second birth, and he thinks no spot without a grave, as you will observe in these lines

Nor

Nor monuments alone, and burial earth,
 Labours with man to this his second birth;
 But where gay palaces in pomp arise,
 And gilded theatres invade the skies,
 Nations shall wake, whose unrespected bones,
 Support the pride of their luxurious sons.
 The most magnificent and costly dome,
 Is but an upper chamber to a tomb.
 No spot on earth but has supply'd a grave,
 And human skulls the spacious ocean pave.
 All's full of man, and at this dreadful turn,
 The swarm shall issue and the hive shall burn.

YOUNG'S LAST DAY.

These lines give you my opinion of the resurrection, or rising from the dead; a subject one cannot think of without ideas widely different from those which folly and superstition have created; as nothing but a serious reflection upon this great day, can fix that hope of future life and immortal glory, which is the firmest ground upon which the pious christian can build his faith of future bliss.

Matilda.

Indeed, Caroline, I am perfectly satisfied with what you have said on this subject; and do not think it likely that the dead body should rise before the awful day of resurrection: for if they be
 C 3 dead,

dead, they cannot; and, if buried alive, they would soon die in the grave.

Caroline.

But if we even grant it possible that they may effect an escape, it is certain when they did die they could not bury themselves; for the dead are incapable of any kind of corporeal business.

Matilda.

That would be impossible. And were they a substance, it would be equally impossible, if returned to this world, for them to retire to the grave, and there to conceal themselves.

Caroline.

I therefore hope you are convinced of the folly of believing the body can rise from, or return to the grave, in this manner?

Henrietta.

But if we indeed believe this, you will grant, no doubt, Caroline, that the spirit can revisit the earth, and take the appearance of the body before death?

Caroline.

When we next meet, I will with pleasure tell you my opinion.

DIA.

DIALOGUE IV.

CAROLINE, HENRIETTA, AND MATILDA.

Henrietta.

PERMIT me, Caroline, to remind you of your promise, respecting your opinion in regard to the probability of the spirits of the dead revisiting earth, in the appearance they used to have when inhabitants of this world.

Caroline.

I fear both you and Matilda will think me very unreasonable, when I assure you, even that favourite belief of yours seems to me to merit much less confidence than you give it.

C 4

Hen-

Henrietta.

Dear Caroline, can you doubt that? Why I have heard it from many, who I am certain would not tell an untruth, that very frightful things have been seen in churchyards, and such places.

Caroline.

If you remember, you have agreed that the body cannot be reunited with the spirit until the resurrection; and that their separation is death.

Henrietta.

Yes; but as we know not where the spirit resides, I do not see why we may not still believe spirits are seen frequently.

Caroline.

If you please, suppose so, and try if you are not equally at a loss to account for many of the actions ascribed to these spirits. But, if neither you nor Matilda find any difficulty in accounting for the various things you have heard of, as the actions and appearance of ghosts, then I am open to conviction; and shall be as happy to own my mistake, as you can be to gain me over to your very pleasant way of thinking; and, as I have no extraordinary courage to boast, I shall be as ready
to

to shrink from my own shadow as either of you ;
but until I have reason to change my opinion, I
shall ever think,

The knell, the shroud, the mattock and the grave,
The deep damp vault, the darkness and the worm ;
These are the bugbears of a winter's eve.

NIGHT THOUGHTS.

Henrietta.

But here is Matilda ; who, as well as myself,
will grant that the body has nothing to do in the
business. Will you not Matilda ?

Matilda.

Yes, most readily ; and I am very glad to find
you on this subject.

Caroline.

If you please then, ladies, to prevent any mis-
understanding on this occasion, it may not be im-
proper, first to know what your notions of a spirit
are ; that we may be fully satisfied whether we
both mean to express the same thing by that
word ; for this explanation is very necessary before
we proceed.

Henrietta.

In this, I know Matilda and myself think alike ;
therefore beg to know your sentiments ; and if they

do not immediately agree with ours, we will inform you in what they are different.

Caroline.

I would first ask, What is a spirit? Do you not suppose it to be an appearance without substance; a resemblance of some bodily form, yet no part of it corporeal, but all shadow.

Matilda.

Yes, Caroline, that is exactly the idea which Henrietta and myself have of them; and in this I think we must be right; for, if any part of them were a substance, they would not be able to vanish or disappear so suddenly, as I have many times heard they do, when no door has been open, yet it has been impossible to trace which way they went.

Caroline.

Well, then it is granted they are all shadows?

Matilda.

We think they are; and that their ashes are not disturbed by their appearance.

Henrietta.

And we likewise think there must have been a great many that have made their appearance, or we could not have heard so much about them.

Caroline.

Then you will not allow that those who first spread those frightful reports could be mistaken.

Henrietta.

As to that, Caroline, if they really saw a ghost, you know if they were a little mistaken in their account of it, one would excuse them, as they might be in haste to get from it.

Caroline.

But, I believe, my good friends, you are not sensible what very different accounts people frequently give when agitated by fear; as fear not only magnifies every object, but so far imposes upon their senses, that they can fancy such figures as were never seen, but by the power of a disordered imagination. As a proof of this, and to make you better understand what I mean, if you please, I will give you a story I have lately met with in the *Children's Friend*; which may serve to show you how very different accounts may be, that are received from people who are actually frightened, and those who are of the opposite party, and have no fears for themselves, or any thought of alarming any other person.

C 6

This

This singular adventure is related by a captain, who says, ' I was coming home one night on horseback, from a visit I had been making to a number of the neighbouring villages, where I had quartered my recruits. It happened there had fallen a deal of rain that day, since noon, and during all the evening, which had broken up the road, and it was raining still with equal violence; but being forced to join my company next morning, I sat out, provided with a lanthorn, having got to pass a strait defile between two mountains. I had cleared it, when a gust of wind took off my hat, and carried it so far that I despaired getting it again, and therefore gave the matter up. By great good fortune, I had with me my red cloak. I covered my head and shoulders with it, leaving nothing but a little hole to see my way, and breathe through; and for fear the wind should take a fancy to my cloak, as well as hat, I passed my right arm round my body to secure it, so that riding on in this position, you may easily conceive my lanthorn, which I held in my right hand, was under my left shoulder. At the entrance of a village, on a hill, I met three travellers, who no sooner saw me, than they ran away, as fast as possible. For my part, I went on upon the gallop, and when come into the town, alighted at an inn, where I designed to rest myself a little; but, soon after, who should enter, but my three poltroons,

troons, as pale as death itself. They told the landlord and his people, trembling as they spoke, that on the road they had encountered a great figure of a man all over blood, whose head was like a flame of fire; and to increase the wonder, placed beneath his shoulder. He was mounted on a dreadful horse, said they, quite black behind, and grey before, which, notwithstanding it was lame, he spurred and whipped right up the mountain with extraordinary swiftness. Here they ended their relation. They had taken care to spread the alarm as they were flying from this wonderful apparition, and the people had come with them to the inn in such a drove, that upward of a hundred were all squeezed together, opening both their mouths and ears at this tremendous story. To make up in some sort for my dismal journey, I resolved to laugh a little, and be merry at their cost, intending to cure them of such fright, by showing them their folly in the present instance. With this view, I got upon my horse again behind the inn, went round about till I had rode the distance of a mile or thereabouts; when, turning, I disposed of accoutrements, that is to say, my cloak and lanthorn, as before, and on I came upon a gallop toward the inn. You should have seen the frightened mob of peasants, how they hid their faces at the sight, and got into the passage. There was no one but the host had courage to remain,

remain, and keep his eye upon me. I was now before the door, on which I shifted the position of my lanthorn, let my cloak drop down upon my shoulders, and appeared the figure he had seen me by his kitchen fire. It was not without real difficulty, we could bring the simple people that had crowded in for safety from their terror: the three travellers, in particular, as the first impression was still strong within them, could not credit what they saw. We finished by a hearty laugh at their expence, and drinking to the man whose head was like a flame of fire, and placed beneath his shoulder.'

CHILDREN'S FRIEND.

I have borrowed this story, to show you how innocently wonderful tales are raised, and that with as little design to impose upon the hearers, as these poor travellers had; therefore, I beg you will not think I doubt the veracity of any of your companions, or, indeed, the veracity of those from whom they heard them; as they might as firmly believe them as you yourselves, and frequently, with no better foundation than this frightened mob of peasants had. But give me leave to ask, ladies, what is your opinion of this account?

Henrietta.

I think the three travellers were very foolish.

But

But had they run away without calling at the inn they might never have been undeceived.

Caroline.

No, certainly; and then, who could have confuted three such firm asserters of this dreadful tale. But what would you wish them to have done on this occasion.

Henrietta.

I would have had them to have stood still, which if they had done, I dare say they might have heard the horse's feet, as he galloped up the hill, and if they had, they must have known it was no ghost.

Matilda.

I wonder they did not; for, as they said, the captain spurred and whipt the horse up the mountain, they might have heard the horse's feet at a considerable distance, had they paid any attention to the sound.

Caroline.

And I beg to know, which way this could serve either to banish their fears, or to prove this was no apparition.

Ma-

Matilda.

The horse must have been a shadow if the rider was so, therefore it could not have made any noise.

Henrietta.

No; neither could his whip or his spurs have hurt him.

Caroline.

Nay, stop Henrietta, or you will certainly make it appear those much dreaded apparitions cannot hurt you, and of course that your fears, your sleepless nights, wild looks, and miserable apprehensions, are against your own judgment and reason. For you seem sensible those shadowy nothings cannot injure you, and that even their acts of violence cannot be felt.

Henrietta.

And yet if I was to see one, I should not be less afraid than I should have been had I continued to think it a reanimated corse. But you, Caroline, are not afraid of any thing.

Caroline.

Indeed, I should be quite as fearful as yourselves, did I think your opinion well founded.

Hen-

Henrietta.

Then you will be so kind as to oblige us with your reasons for disbelieving that the spirits of the dead revisit this world.

Caroline.

Most certainly. I shall be glad to give my reasons why I really think they are never seen but in imagination. But our time at present will not admit of much more than what I have already attempted; which has been to show you the possibility of people being very much mistaken.

Matilda.

Thus far we acknowledge, and doubt not but there are a few instances of such ignorant people as the travellers having been deceived.

Caroline.

There is one thing I have particularly noticed, and think very singular, which is, that in your remarks you seem to think the eye could only have been imposed upon, and that they should have made use of their ears, to undeceive them, and to have banished their fears. For my part, I think the hearing as easy to be imposed upon as the sight, and that both these senses are subservient to the powers of the imagination. It may not therefore
be

be unnecessary, when we again renew this subject, to mention what you have read, but do not think of at present, which will at least prove, that the ear has been as much deceived as the eye can possibly be; and at the same time that the relation will not admit of a doubt of its truth, it will exhibit a high wrought picture of the effects of fear upon the imagination.

DIA-

DIALOGUE V.

CAROLINE, MATILDA, AND HENRIETTA.

Matilda.

WE are now met, Caroline, in expectation of hearing your sentiments in regard to those unaccountable noises which frequently make part of the frightful tales we hear.

Caroline.

And that leads me to the relation I mentioned, as having escaped your observation.

Matilda.

In what have we read it?

Caroline.

Caroline.

In Scripture. But you have not reflected upon it; or at least in a manner that could enable you to draw a conclusion, which to me appears not only very plain, but very curious.

Henrietta.

I hope it will enable us to account for some of the things we have heard of.

Caroline.

So far as to show you the powerful effects of fear created by a noise. We have an example of a mighty host being deceived, and fleeing away with such haste and precipitation as to leave their garments in the way.

Matilda.

Pray, Caroline, where is this related?

Caroline.

In the seventh chapter of the second book of Kings, where, speaking of the leprous men at the gate of Samaria, it is as follows:

‘ And they said one to another, why sit we here until we die ?

And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come
to

to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there.

For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.

Wherefore they arose, and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their lives.

And the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, go and see.

And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste.

This account, my dear ladies, I have given you from different parts of the chapter, passing over what was not so immediately to the purpose of expressing either their flight or fear; which, though from a supernatural cause, merits your attention.

Matilda.

As I never noticed this account before, I am much surpris'd at the astonishing haste to be observed in this description of their flight.

Hen-

Henrietta.

Yes, they did not even take time to untie their horses, or their asses; although, one must imagine, they might have been glad to have mounted, and thereby have added to their speed.

Caroline.

Their fear, no doubt, deprived them of this thought, which must naturally have presented itself, had not that passion taken too deep possession of their hearts.

Matilda.

I think they gave an equal proof of their fears in casting away their garments, in order to facilitate their flight.

Caroline.

But do you not observe how powerfully their imaginations were worked upon?

Henrietta.

Yes, wonderfully; for they said one to another, lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us.

Caro-

Caroline.

Then do not you observe, that neither the kings of the Hittites, or the kings of the Egyptians, knew any thing of the affair. No, nor yet the king of Israel, to whom they attributed their danger.

Matilda.

All this I observe. But this was what you know pleased the Almighty.

Caroline.

Most certainly; and it would have been equally easy to him, to have sent the armies their imaginations depicted.

Henrietta.

Most certainly; had he pleased.

Caroline.

But you may observe the words. For the Lord had *made the host* of the Syrians to *hear a great noise*. Now, as the mighty host which they thought they heard was not necessary, so it is equally possible they might be only made to hear a noise, as of chariots and of horses, &c. and yet there be no real noise, only as fixed upon their imaginations.

Hen-

- *Henrietta.*

I must own that seems most likely; for if there really was at that time a noise so tremendous, as to seem the noise of a great host, yet not any of the kings or their armies were there, or disturbed relative to it.

Caroline.

Not one of them were so much as acquainted with it. Therefore does it not seem at least possible, that, notwithstanding what poor frightened mortals may imagine, the dead may rest equally undisturbed, and unacquainted with their fears and apprehensions. For an all-merciful Creator, who breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, and when he pleases calls us from the scenes of mortality, can alone give permission for the bonds of death to be broken, and the fleeting spirit to be brought back to earth.

Matilda.

I must own there seems a degree of probability that the dead may not be disturbed, as it is plain, the living were not, when the Syrians thought they were, and on that account left the camp.

Henrietta.

But do you, Caroline, really believe that people

ple are made to see appearances which have no reality.

Caroline.

The dark veil of ignorance is drawn over our researches into futurity; and all we have to do is, to rely with implicit confidence upon a kind and allwise eternal Protector, to whom we cannot ascribe any folly or imperfection in the disposal of events.

Henrietta.

But when we are alone, and afraid, we are apt to forget this.

Caroline.

Yet to him, who is ever present, and to whom light or darkness are equal, we ought to look for courage and fortitude, and to consider, that when guarded by him, nothing can hurt us, without his knowledge and permission: then may we hope from our confidence in the ever-present Deity, to be animated with courage, and enabled to see what foolish phantom or mischievous companion, thus innocently alarms, or cruelly sports with our feelings, and thereby endangers our health, or perhaps understanding.

D

Hen-

Henrietta.

For the future, I hope I shall always have courage enough to look upon what thus alarms me.

Caroline.

Do but keep this resolution, and you will, I am sensible, always be convinced that what alarms you are no ghosts, no shadows, no apparitions; but on the contrary, real substances, from which you have nothing to fear.

Matilda.

But, Caroline, suppose we should be like the Syrians, 'made to hear a noise,' or made to see some vision by a supernatural power?

Caroline.

In that case, you would need supernatural aid to protect you, from any bad effects.

But tell me, can any mortal raise the dead, body or spirit, and give them powers of action?

Matilda.

No, that is impossible; and if any pretend to that power, it must be imposition.

Caro-

Caroline.

If then they are raised, and receive the powers of action, it follows it is from some high order, more than mortal.

Matilda.

Most certainly : or the wicked might be always disturbing, and tormenting them, by bringing them back to life,

Caroline.

If then, they are sent by an immortal power, it must be for some great and wise purpose. And if so, how can it be that houses and people, are said to have been haunted for years, without any person being able to find out the cause ?

Matilda.

It is not likely that supernatural power should be used so ineffectually, and that for ages.

Caroline.

No, that would be to ascribe folly to the Being who sent them, or permitted their coming.

But so many of those reports have had their foundation in interest, that it must render the whole liable to be suspected, of arising from some

private motive, as interest, revenge, or a secret love of mischief. And it seems reasonable to think, where they have a better foundation, they will show it by answering the high commission on which they were sent. For it would be absurd, not to say wicked, to imagine the eternal Author of nature, to whom the spirits of mortals belong, should summon them for causes to which they were unequal, or the bad effects of which he could not be ignorant.

Henrietta.

And yet I never heard any of those tales any way account for their business on earth.

Caroline.

One would naturally suppose some great discoveries must have been made, or some great changes have taken place. Some private merit have been rewarded, or some hidden guilt revealed, by their appearance.

Henrietta.

Instead of which, all we hear of is the fear and the horror of mind they are expected with, and are sure to create; though no one knows why they come.

Caro-

Caroline.

For which reason, it appears more likely that the senses may be imposed upon by fear, as that strong passion has frequently operated so powerfully upon the imagination, as to deprive the senses of their force, and leave the subject of these terrors, whether real or imaginary, no better than an idiot; or by the deranged state of the understanding, much worse, as unable to combat the most erroneous or horrid ideas by the efforts of reason, or sound judgment.

Matilda.

You seem, Caroline, to place a great deal to the power of the imagination.

Caroline.

Indeed I do; as I am of opinion it adds much more to our happiness, or misery, than we in general suppose.

You may frequently observe, whatever the mind is predisposed to believe, it turns every accidental occurrence to a proof of the reality of its existence. And thus has the superstition of all ages had many an innocent supporter.

Matilda.

But you do not think we are superstitious?

D 3.

Caro-

Caroline.

I think you unfortunate, in having imbibed your fears from the ignorant and superstitious; for these two things are generally to be met with together.

Henrietta.

But pray, Caroline, how do you answer several parts of Scripture, which seem to countenance a belief in ghosts.

Caroline.

I have no need of being capable of answering those parts to be convinced of the improbability of meeting with any at present; neither, indeed, does a disbelief of what we hear of such appearances in these days, argue any disbelief of what we read of former times.

Henrietta.

Then you do not argue against there having been such things in former days?

Caroline.

No, my dear Henrietta, by no means.

Matilda.

But if you allow they in former times made their
appear-

appearance upon earth, pray why may we not as well conclude they do now?

Caroline.

Angels themselves were in those days not unfrequently messengers to mortals; therefore, according to that argument, you may expect to meet with angels. And I beg you will tell me when you hope to be favoured with a visit.

Matilda.

Indeed, I should be afraid to meet even angels; but we are satisfied there is no occasion for fear respecting them at present.

Caroline.

Such miracles are ceased; nor need a Christian wonder why. But ignorance and superstition still continue.

Henrietta.

Do you think it wicked to be superstitious?

Caroline.

I think it very troublesome, and what it is our duty to strive against, by a proper and vigilant use of our reason, And this I would do for two reasons; first, for the ease and peace of mind of my-

self, and those about me; and next to prevent my being made to appear ridiculous, and disagreeable.

Matilda.

But pray, Caroline, do not you wonder how people can be mistaken, when they see those they have been acquainted with for years?

Caroline.

I certainly should wonder much more, if I did not think them mistaken; but I am sensible it is not an easy matter for you to give up an opinion, which has long had possession of your mind, and has been most powerfully supported by fear.

Matilda.

I confess it seems more likely that the people should be mistaken, than that the dead should be disturbed. But yet, when they have been seen just the same dressed, as they used to be when living, and in the very clothes they used to wear, one would think in this they could not be mistaken.

Caroline.

Ah! there is the difficulty, there is the grand obstacle to your disbelief of any absurdity, that your reason will not permit you intirely to rely upon.

Ma-

Matilda.

Well, I own this always staggers me, as it certainly is a striking proof that they are not mistaken, when their very dress is so well known, and so particularly remarked.

Caroline.

I have long observed you have always quoted this observation of their clothes, as the grand and incontestable proof of their reality.

Henrietta.

And you, Caroline, I doubt not, will own it is so.

Caroline.

You must excuse me, ladies, if I laugh at this part of your belief, as more truly absurd than any other of your opinions respecting these fearful apparitions.

Matilda.

If you can make it appear so, I shall not have much difficulty to give up the rest of my belief respecting them.

Henrietta.

Nor I neither; for we all look upon this conclusion

clusion as a confirmation of the truth of any account of this sort we have among us ; and we never doubt any thing, when the veracity of the person is depended upon, and their dress corresponds so well with what they used to wear.

Caroline.

But why do you depend upon this as any proof?

Matilda.

For two reasons; first, we think they are not so easily mistaken ; and next, we think it shows the persons time for observation : therefore will not admit of that probability of their being mistaken, or misled by fear.

Caroline.

When I have the pleasure of your company for a longer time, than I can at present be indulged with, my dear ladies, I shall be singularly happy in assuring you, it is not from rudeness, that I laugh at the opinions you have imbibed. On the contrary, was I not well convinced you would excuse me, I certainly would not indulge myself in a mirth which flows not from any idea of superior judgment, but from a reflection upon my own fears and follies of this kind, which I once so slavishly felt, that I think myself most particularly fortunate in being so happy as early to be better informed;

informed; and next to my thankfulness for that freedom, from the most abject slavery of mind to the tyrant Fear. And I hope I shall experience an enviable satisfaction in the idea of having set your minds at liberty from a slavery of the same kind.

Matilda.

O! Caroline, we thought you never had been afraid of any thing; therefore concluded you could not judge what this weakness in others might subject them to suffer.

Caroline.

Yes, my dear Matilda, no child was ever more the slave of fear than myself; nor can you be surprised that I was, when you hear that I had a governess, who by her frightful tales, absolutely, though unintentionally, taught me to be so. Her custom was, to tell us the most horrid stories of ghosts and apparitions; and such were the effects, that, notwithstanding it was daytime, and in school hours, yet, child as I was, I used to observe how much nearer we were insensibly crept to each other, than we were at the time the tale began, so apparent was the fear by them created, and such its immediate effects. But, alas! they stopped not here; for I had them deeply impressed upon my mind for years.

Matilda.

I am astonished to hear you ever have known fear on any occasion.

Henrietta.

I am very glad you have, because you can pity us; and, though you laugh at us, you cannot think we are more foolish in this business than you have been yourself.

Caroline.

If I had not so particularly suffered myself from the same cause, I never could have been so anxious to free your minds from this dreadful inquietude, as I could never have judged so well of your sufferings, and therefore should not have felt the same desire to aid your own endeavours toward a rational inquiry and consideration of the cause of those terrors, whether real or imaginary. For, if you are any thing like what I was, when subject to these alarms, you must be anxious to conceal those painful feelings, which fear creates, and which are so strong, as frequently to endanger, not only the health, but the faculties of the mind; which in youth, are, perhaps, more liable to be injured, and always dependent upon the state of the corporeal powers to which they are connected.

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Henrietta.

Since I find you have been equally subject to those fears, which we feel ; if possible, I will listen with more attention. For I shall now hope to be as free from fear as you are.

Matilda.

I rejoice that you have known what it is to be afraid. And I see your kind intention more clearly, by this free confession.

Caroline.

And I, on my part, shall think my trouble well repaid, if what I can say on the subject has the desired effect, of unbinding you from your slavish fetters. But, at present, must conclude our conversation, and renew the subject the next opportunity.

Matilda.

And then we shall hear, I hope, why you are so much entertained at our depending upon the accounts we have had respecting people having been seen in the clothes they used to wear.

Caroline.

Yes, if you please, we will use our reason and reflection

fection while we consider how much greater proof this is of their reality, and how far this opinion will bear examination, you yourselves shall judge; and if you find this grand, incontestable proof, to be without foundation, then I hope you will have less difficulty to see the absurdity of every argument in favour of those absurd relations.

Matilda.

While we continue to believe this strong proof of their appearance, we cannot get the better of our belief of their reality, as this is a sort of foundation for our opinion.

Caroline.

You have raised a horrid building, and laid many a trembling foundation.

DIA.

DIALOGUE VI.

CAROLINE, MATILDA, AND HENRIETTA.

Caroline.

MANY questions will naturally arise from the common assertion, which so frequently accompanies the tales you hear of ghosts: I mean respecting their dress being the very same they wore when alive. The first of which I wish you to answer is, Where do you suppose they get those clothes, granting them to be the same they really were possessed of when living?

Matilda.

I never thought how they came by them, nor can I now think by what means.

Caro-

Caroline.

Perhaps you, Henrietta, may better answer this question. And I hope you will endeavour to make it appear easy and clear, as you see I allow you to believe the assertion; and all that I ask is, that you will account for it in any way that can even satisfy yourselves. But first consider, if they are actually the same they used to have when on earth, they must either have taken them along with them, or, some how, have obtained them since. Now let me ask, do you think they took their clothes with them into the other world?

Henrietta.

We must permit you to laugh now: for, if we answer, no; then the question yet remains, How then did they come by them?

Caroline.

Yes; for though I have heard of the ancient Arabs having their camels tied to their sepulchres, and being permitted to perish there, that they might be ready for their master's use in the next world; yet never did I hear of any method of conveying garments to those spiritual inhabitants.

Ma-

Matilda.

But perhaps they are not the very same they used to wear, only immediately like them.

Caroline.

If you can even account for their manner of obtaining clothes immediately, like those they used to have on earth, I will give some credit to your belief, as that might prevent great confusion; for if the clothes were really missing, and a spirit had happened to borrow them, to play a few tricks in, not one of the family, I dare say, would suspect their shadowy forms had any occasion for them; and therefore some innocent mortal would be suspected.

Henrietta.

Indeed, Caroline, you make too light of these subjects. But suppose they are not the same, but only like them.

Caroline.

I will grant that, if you please. But you will observe, this greatly weakens your argument; as, you may remember, you very strongly relied upon the reality of these clothes, as a proof of their being no mistake possible. But if we only suppose them to bear a resemblance something like them, but
not

not the very same, it is natural to make another inquiry, which follows; Pray, where is their wardrobe? And who works so curiously for these aerial beings? For my part, I should not like his office.

Henrietta.

But, if you please, we will suppose they have them; though, I own, I cannot tell how, or where; yet I wish you to grant it possible.

Caroline.

But, my dear Henrietta, you cannot suppose their garments are spirits, like themselves.

Henrietta.

No, that would be nonsense.

Caroline.

And yet, if you will but give yourself a moment's time to reflect, you will perceive the absurdity of imagining a shadow capable of supporting a substance.

Matilda.

How glad I should be to find some way of accounting for those garments which they wear.

Caro-

Caroline.

You will find that somewhat difficult. For, if they themselves be shadows, which you have already allowed, how can they, as such, support any substance you wished to hang upon their shoulders. For instance; when you see your own shadow, or that of any other person, can you make it support the lightest substance, or can you any way fix for a moment the smallest substance upon a shadow.

Matilda.

No, not even a feather.

Caroline.

Does not this then prove it impossible for these phantoms to be dressed in the very clothes they used to wear?

Henrietta.

Are not you surpris'd, my dear Matilda, at our want of reflection, when we used to hear this repeated so frequently.

Matilda.

Indeed I am; for had we but reflected upon it, we must have seen the impossibility of that being the case; and instead of being satisfied with this assertion, it would have appeared absurd.

Caro-

Caroline.

I flatter myself you now see clearly, if they were any thing but shadow, they could not be supported by a spirit, such as you now suppose a ghost to be, whether you call it by that name, or by those of apparition, phantom, shadow, &c.

Matilda.

Nothing can be more evident.

Caroline.

But if you suppose their garments to be shadows.

Henrietta.

Indeed, we must suppose so, as we cannot account for them by any other means.

Caroline.

Then I hope you will not stop here, but suppose all around you to be no more.

Matilda.

And pray, why so, Caroline?

Caroline.

For this reason; if one inanimate substance has a shadow, another must be supposed to have the same kind of shadowy resemblance; therefore
your

your tables and chairs must be as likely, as your clothes, to have this kind of shadowy appearance capable of action.

Matilda.

That is absolutely impossible.

Henrietta.

Yes, this would be nonsense; and therefore we cannot believe it.

Caroline.

But do me the favour to tell me, why?

Matilda.

It is impossible to think either our clothes, furniture, or any lifeless substance, should, in this, any way resemble the human race, and on that account we cannot believe it is your own opinion.

Henrietta.

No, Caroline, you know we have already agreed that a ghost is the spirit, or eternal part of the human form; and that when it is separated from the body, their separation is death.

Caroline.

Then it is plain, these clothes can have no such spiritual essence, no spirit and substance, no eternal

nal and earthly parts, but are as other lifeless inanimate substances, fit only for mortals, and not subject to the use, or fit for the wardrobe of spirits.

But, believe me, it is all imagination, that, 'Gives form to fancy, and embodies thought.'

Matilda.

I wonder we never saw any absurdity in whatever we heard on these subjects; but I now begin to think many of those tales have had their rise from things done to frighten children.

Caroline.

There is no doubt, many of them have had their rise from no better foundation. But when this is the case, and children's fears are too much sported with for the sake of a cruel indulgence, the effects are sometimes dreadful; and I think those, who occasion them, merit punishment for this kind of injury more than for many actions which are punishable by the laws of the land.

Henrietta.

They certainly give one great pain for the time.

Caroline.

Yes, and many times the effects upon the understanding

derstanding has been fatal ; and that is much worse than any bodily affliction.

Matilda.

But you know they are very frequently only intended to create a little innocent mirth ; and then you must agree that there can be no sort of harm in them.

Caroline.

I own the intention may be very harmless ; but as there is no knowing the consequence, I wish you may never attempt any thing of the sort to frighten your companions ; and to show you the danger of such an attempt, I will give you a story, that merits your attention, as it exhibits a proof of the bad effects of this kind of folly.

Matilda.

We shall be much obliged to you.

Henrietta.

Indeed we shall, not only for the story, but for your kindness in giving it, for a caution to us against what we might otherwise very sincerely repent of.

Caroline.

I think it well calculated to answer that desirable
end.

end. I will give it you, as related in the Children's Friend :

‘ Peregrine, a child of great vivacity and understanding, had adopted such a turn toward music, that beside his daily playing on the organ, which his master came to give him every morning, he would go at night to his master, who resided in the neighbourhood, and there repeat it.

‘ Peregrine’s brother was a good boy likewise, but had something of a turn toward drollery ; and spent the time, when Peregrine was at his book, in always scheming how he might play off some trick or other, no ways minding who became the object of his waggery. He took notice that his brother frequently came home alone, and sometimes when it was dark, and turned his thoughts upon a scheme to frighten him a little. He could walk in stilts. One evening, therefore, at the time his brother was expected home, he put himself in a pair of very high ones, wrapped a great white sheet about him, that trailed far behind him upon the ground ; and took a broad brimmed hat, which first of all he flapped, and having covered it with crape, of a sufficient length to hang a great way down on every side, but most of all before him, put it upon his head.

‘ Thus frightfully equipped, he placed himself upright, and at a little distance from the house,
close

close by the garden gate, through which his brother entered always coming home.

‘ This last was now returning, in the innocent delight peculiar to a child, and humming to himself the tune he had been playing. He had got within a dozen paces of the gate, when he perceived the vast colossus, that held out his arms, advancing to attack him. Agitated with a mortal fright, at such an apparition, he fell down upon the ground, deprived of understanding. Poor Augustus, who had not foreseen the consequences of his fatal frolic, threw away immediately his mask, and fell upon his brother’s almost breathless body; and did every thing he could do to reanimate him: but alas! the unhappy little fellow, as he found, was every thing but absolutely dead. His parents instantly came running to the spot, and with a deal of difficulty brought him back to life. He opened his eyes, and viewed them with a vacant, stupid look. They gave him every tender name they could invent, while he appeared as if he could not comprehend them. He endeavoured, but in vain, to speak; he essayed to do so, but without articulation. He is now deaf, dumb, and foolish, and will very probably remain in such a situation all his life-time. Six or seven months have passed, since this deplorable occurrence, and the doctors that attend him have, as yet, done nothing toward his cure. Imagine, little friends, if you are able,

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the distress and sorrow of his parents. It would certainly have been better, both for them and him too, had he died upon the spot. They would not then have every day before them such a piteous object of affliction and despair. But their distress is nothing in comparison of Augustus's. Since the unhappy accident, he has been like a skeleton, much more than a human creature. He can neither eat nor sleep. His tears exhaust him. Twenty times a day he walks about the room, and suddenly stops short: he wrings his hands, pulls off his hair, and mourns even his birth. He calls upon, and embraces his dear brother, who no longer knows him. I have seen them both, and cannot tell which of the two is most unhappy.'

Thus, my dear ladies, ends this account, which is so shocking to humanity, that one cannot be insensible to the dreadful effects arising from a mistaken, though perfectly innocent playfulness of disposition, which would never have been indulged, had Augustus been acquainted with the dangerous consequences. And I flatter myself it will not be in vain, that I give you this as a caution against a wish to frighten any of your companions; and when I reflect how much concern it would give you to be the occasion of such misfortunes, I cannot for a moment doubt its having the desired effect.

Me-

Matilda.

Thank you, dear Caroline, for your kind intention, and be assured I will henceforth be very careful never to do any thing of this sort.

Caroline.

Nor any other, I hope, that can subject a poor creature to such horror; for, indeed, when you indulge yourselves in foolish sport of this kind, you know not where it will end, or what may be the dreadful result of a terrified imagination. And I beg you, Henrietta, will not, as you value your peace of mind.

Henrietta.

Believe me, I shall never think of doing any thing so alarming, and I am much surprised that Augustus should; as he, you know, so dressed, and in stilts, must make a most horrid figure, and frightful enough to terrify any person.

Caroline.

I shall be very glad to find this example, or any thing I can say, may restrain you in the hours of gaiety from a dangerous, though common kind of mirth, which may be attended with the most dreadful consequences. And in this, I am more

particularly concerned for your own happiness than you may, on a first thought, imagine; as I am too well acquainted with your dispositions to think it possible you could be the authors of so much misery to any one intentionally; and if otherwise you were so unfortunate, you, like poor Augustus, would be objects of pity.

Matilda.

I think I could never again be happy, if any thing I did in jest had so dreadful a conclusion.

Henrietta.

Nor I neither, and yet one might do a thing in jest very innocently.

Caroline.

It is therefore necessary to inform you of the bad consequence of mirth of this sort, as I am far from supposing you would, either of you, intend any harm; nor do I think you have any cruelty in your intentions. But I beg you to reflect a moment, and you will, I think, consider as cruel, the effects of fear. After which consideration, I think you cannot deem that innocent or harmless, which may, by its effects, terminate in consequences fatal to the life or happiness of the unfortunate object of your sport.

But

But I am the more anxious for your attention to the bad effects of fear of this sort, as I can, from my own knowledge, assure you, that a fine girl at school, whose figure and understanding were justly admired, was, by an excess of fear, deprived of her senses, and from that time only grew in stature ; but with her understanding lost every power of improvement, and all her life after, was a downright idiot, incapable of mixing with company, or any way enjoying society. And so far was she deprived of the blessings which opulent parents and a large fortune could bestow, that her riches could only give her an attendant to keep her from harm, and apartments and pleasure grounds, to which she was quite insensible, as no alteration in them were ever capable of gaining the least observation, or any way seeming to impress her senses.

Matilda.

Thank you for this additional caution ; but pray how was this young lady so frightened ?

Caroline.

By a frolick of her companions at school, who had no thought of the dangerous effects, and only wished to produce, by their scheme, a little mirth the next day. But it was in the night, and they saw not the violence of her terror, nor apprehend

ed any lasting or bad effects before morning ; when her illness convinced them of their error.

Matilda.

I would not have been any of those young ladies for the world.

Henrietta.

Surely, if any one was particularly concerned in this business, she must be wretched, and blame herself much ; and the young ladies friends must blame her greatly.

Caroline.

But if you are inclined to condemn her, it is because you do not reflect how far she was from any intention of harm to her companion ; nor were the other young ladies concerned any way less innocent, in respect to the intention ; for they all loved and admired the person they rendered an object of compassion, by their ill-timed and inconsiderate diversion. Yet, alas ! they themselves were greatly to be pitied on this occasion. But I leave you to think what they must suffer.

Henrietta.

When we blame any one concerned, it must be in a great measure owing to our forgetting the person

person was like Augustus ; who, far from wishing any harm to poor Peregrine, whom he loved so affectionately, he expected him to share in the mirth, when his fright was over.

Caroline.

Certainly, this is the case ; and they are in general objects of our compassion, who have been, by a high flow of spirits, and a lively imagination hurried into these flights of folly ; which does not permit them to reflect upon the possible consequence. Nor do they seem sensible how very different and how very tremendous many things appear, from not knowing what they are, or any way expecting uncommon appearances.

Matilda.

From this moment I shall ever be afraid of doing any thing which may appear dreadful to others, or any way endanger their health or senses ; and I shall not forget, that what appears the most innocent and trifling play to me, if intended for no other purpose than frightening people, may have unexpected bad effects upon those who are unacquainted with what it is that surprises them.

Henrietta.

It seems highly necessary to notice, though it may not strike our attention at the time we think

of playing any of our acquaintance a trick to frighten them, that the little things we think of for that purpose may not to us appear at all capable of any dreadful effects : but I believe, many have suffered from surprise, as well as fear, and those things we think the least of, may have disagreeable effects from their being so very unexpected.

Caroline.

If we rightly weigh the danger attending sporting with people's fears, we shall not, I believe, think it allowable in ourselves ; as those most likely to be alarmed are those whose prepossessions make them more particularly subject to the dangerous excess which may have a melancholy termination, both with regard to them and ourselves : for I cannot by any means omit your own danger in regard to the destruction of your future peace, which the knowledge of being the cause of an irreparable injury, would not fail to occasion, in minds like yours, replete with good and humane sentiments.

Matilda.

I am glad I have not been the undesigned occasion of so much misery.

Henrietta.

I too rejoice it has not happened to either of us, as we might have been in the situation of the young lady's companions, or poor Augustus.

Caro-

Caroline.

Permit me, dear ladies, to congratulate you on your happy escape from those horrid reflections, which you might now have suffered, had your innocent, though thoughtless tricks, happened to have had an unlooked for and fearful effect; but I now trust your resolution is fixed, by the risk you are made sensible you run in giving way to the impulse of a foolish gaiety, which may just as well be turned to some other less dangerous merriment.

Henrietta.

If some boys had seen the melancholy effect their frightful appearance had upon Peregrine, it seems likely they would not have behaved so generously, as, like Augustus, to have acknowledged it; but, on the contrary, have run away, and pretended to know nothing about him.

Caroline.

That would have been very easy; for in the confusion the family were in, they would not have suspected any thing of the kind; and the little fellow was never able to explain the affair for himself.

Does it not seem likely, that if fewer of these frightful tricks were practised, it would lessen the

number of wonderful tales of spectres, so variously described? For I am of your opinion, Henrietta, and think, that had some boys done this, if their intention had been as harmless as possible; yet, when they found the mischief attending it so great, they would not have dared to have appeared in the business, but would have concealed their being acquainted with it; and I can see no way that could have made them suspected.

Matilda.

And then, you know, nothing but Peregrine's inability to speak, could possibly have prevented a very shocking description.

Caroline.

Most certainly he would have given, and likewise have believed, a most frightful account; and we may be sensible, from the strength of his fear, he could not believe it any common appearance. Much less did he think it any of his companions, or a brother.

Henrietta.

Then, why may not many of the accounts we hear and believe, arise from tricks of this sort.

Caroline.

Frequently they must, if they have any better
foun-

foundation than a fertile invention, or the strange and laughable transformation which the most common object will sometimes undergo in the eyes of one who is apprehensive of seeing the dreadful appearances she has heard of, and as firmly believes; though in reality they are only fit to create a momentary laugh at those who believe them.

Matilda.

Indeed, Caroline, you should not laugh at such serious things.

Caroline.

I hope never to laugh at what ought to be serious; but as these are certainly only the phantoms of imagination, I feel myself quite at liberty to be merry whenever I am in the humour to be so, and they are the subject of conversation.

DIALOGUE VII.

CAROLINE, MATILDA, HENRIETTA, AND
EDWIN.

Matilda.

EXCUSE us, dear Caroline, for thus taking the liberty of adding master Edwin to our party.

Caroline.

Believe me, ladies, there needs no apology respecting master Edwin's introduction; as I am so well acquainted with his merit and good disposition, that I esteem myself much obliged by the favour of his company.

Edwin.

Edwin.

I am greatly indebted to my good tutor on this occasion. Indeed, he makes me sure of being well received by all who know him ; and I thank you, madam, for your good opinion.

Caroline.

You judge right, master Edwin. I have heard with much pleasure your praise from Mr. L—, whose affection for you, and the high character he has given you for your attention and diligent application, do you the utmost credit.

Edwin.

How much I am obliged to him. But I am sensible his instructions are intended to make me virtuous and happy ; and therefore I cannot neglect to pay him the greatest attention.

Caroline.

It would most certainly be your own loss, if your application did not keep pace with his wishes, Yet, though you take no merit to yourself, for thus seconding his endeavours, it must yield great satisfaction to your friends to observe you so predisposed to receive instructions, which are the result

sult of his study, for the improvement of your mind and manners.

Edwin.

I am sensible of the great benefit I have received from his anxious care over me, and I hope nothing will ever induce me to be idle or inattentive to his orders or requests, as that must end in my own future disadvantage and disgrace.

Caroline.

It is happy for you that you are blessed with so just a way of thinking; and that you have a true knowledge of your tutor's kindness, and a heart capable of unfeigned gratitude for his friendship; all which will recommend you to the worthy part of mankind, and secure to you the esteem of those whose society may contribute much to your future felicity and honour.

Matilda.

Notwithstanding the many good qualities which master Edwin is said to possess, yet not any recommend him to the regards of our family so much as his inviolable adherence to truth and sincerity.

Edwin.

Indeed, ladies, I should be very much ashamed if

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if I could submit to the baseness of a falsehood; and I should consider myself as unworthy your society, if capable of that detestable meanness, which in me would be more blameable than in many others, who have never been shown the guilt and meanness that accompany falsehood and base deceit.

Caroline.

These are the principles by which you gain so much reputation, and so justly merit that degree of confidence that you are so universally treated with.

Edwin.

I doubt not, madam, what you say; but can assure you, I need no other reward than the approbation of my own heart. The gift of speech is a blessing which I have been taught to observe the brute creation are without. The reason why is plain: they, being without reason, would abuse that valuable gift.

Caroline.

Yes; but their want of reason would render this abuse involuntary and unavoidable.

Edwin.

This, madam, I grant; but this will not excuse

cuse the only part of the creation that has it in their power to offend that way. On the contrary, we must ever wonder at their ingratitude for making a wicked use of so noble and valuable a privilege.

Caroline.

Valuable privilege, indeed ! that distinguishes the particular bounty of a wise Creator to the human race. But, alas ! while we sigh from recent sufferings caused by the treacherous tongue of the dissembler, or the more openly daring voice of direct falsehood ; they alike prove the mercy of an almighty Ruler, whose power could stop in a moment the base torrent of the deceitful tongue, and inflict the punishment of lasting silence upon the person guilty of uttering a known falsehood.

Edwin.

They have their punishment in a conscious sense of meanness, which must attend them. And they cannot be long without the mortification of seeing themselves universally disbelieved.

Caroline.

I am of your opinion, master Edwin ; and I cannot observe the horrid practice of duelling, of late so common on these occasions, without looking upon it as a strong, though shocking proof, of the uni-

universality of opinion which prevails in respect to this vice; for it is held in such general detestation, that to be charged with it, is deemed an insult so great, that the risk of life has been too frequently thought its necessary reply.

Edwin.

This practice is not uncommon in other nations, as well as England.

Matilda.

And would you fight any person who might thus insult you?

Edwin.

If I was not guilty of that base crime, I should wish, as a gentleman, to meet the person who charged me with it. But, as a Christian, I should not dare; as my tutor says, that would only be proving myself capable of murder, to convince the world I was not guilty of the less, though great offence of falsehood.

Caroline.

Pray, master Edwin, permit me to ask a few questions respecting your acquaintance with young Williamson.

Edwin.

Edwin.

I shall be happy to give you any information in my power.

Caroline.

I hear he is remarkably superstitious. Pray, is it true?

Edwin.

Very true, madam; for he is most particularly so.

Caroline.

What then are his pursuits? What progress does he make in his various studies? Is he not esteemed one of the first in learning among those of his age?

Edwin.

I am sorry that is not the case. On the contrary, you may find he studies the interpretation of his last night's dream more than his books; and when he should be writing his Latin exercises, he is frequently engaged in some superstitious relation of what he has heard or seen, which his imagination depicts as so many good or bad omens, that respect himself or friends.

Caro-

Caroline.

Then these absurd notions impede his improvement; and, I doubt not, subject him to much laughter.

Edwin.

O! very much; for he is always alarming himself with some nonsense or other.

Caroline.

Poor boy! perhaps he is not blessed with good natural abilities?

Edwin.

If that was the case, his misfortune would create compassion in every humane breast; but it is not any defect of abilities, but a want of exertion of them, and he is therefore very much laughed at.

Caroline.

But how can this strange way of thinking be accounted for? Pray, to what cause do they attribute this weakness?

Edwin.

To an attachment he has had from an infant to a faithful servant, who attended him the greatest part

part of his life ; and who is said to have many excellent qualities, though mixed with this kind of folly, which the family thought nothing of, but greatly esteemed this attendant.

Caroline.

But do they observe the consequence ?

Edwin.

Yes, and blame him for what they call a shameful want of exertion in not endeavouring to throw off those prejudices, now he ought to know better.

Caroline.

It is certainly his duty to use his reason, on a subject that so much engages his attention.

Edwin.

So much his attention is engaged, as to prevent his improvement ; and, it exposes him to the ridicule of his acquaintance, who only hear him, to make game of him when they meet together.

Henrietta.

This is cruel ; but I hope you never join in the laugh against him.

Edwin.

Edwin.

It is absolutely impossible to do otherwise, so absurd are his strange prejudices.

Caroline.

But it is possible he remains insensible to his loss of improvement, as well as to the ridicule to which he exposes himself by those absurd prejudices.

Edwin.

My tutor, madam, is of that opinion.

Caroline.

But I am afraid Mr. L— does not think there is any lasting bad consequence to be apprehended from master Williamson's superstition, does he?

Edwin.

Yes, madam; and is very sorry for it.

Caroline.

What pity it is that Mr. L— does not think himself at liberty to exert himself in endeavours to bring the youth to a more rational way of thinking.

Edwin.

Edwin.

He thinks it of serious consequence; and in order to convince a friend of his, who is a distant relation of young Williamson, of the great power of the imagination over the mind, and how much of happiness or misery we may derive from it, he showed him the sentiments of his favourite author Addison on this subject.

Caroline.

Can you oblige us with them?

Edwin.

Yes, madam, I am happy I can.

Caroline.

Pray read them.

Edwin.

After other reflections on this subject, he says:
'How great a power then may we suppose lodged in him, who knows all the ways of affecting the imagination; who can infuse what ideas he pleases, and fill those ideas with terror or delight, to what degree he thinks fit? He can excite images in the mind without the help of words, and make scenes rise up before us, and seem present to the eye,
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without the assistance of bodies, or exterior objects. He can transport the imagination with such beautiful and glorious visions, as cannot possibly enter into our present conceptions; or haunt it with such ghastly spectres and apparitions, as would make us hope for annihilation, and think existence no better than a curse. In short, he can so exquisitely ravish or torture the soul through this single faculty, as might suffice to make the whole heaven or hell of any finite being.

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Caroline.

We are much obliged to you for thus furnishing us with the sentiments of a man of such great abilities. But pray, ladies, what are your observations upon them.

Matilda.

Of that part, where he speaks of images rising in the mind without the help of words, and scenes seeming present to the eye without the help of bodies, or exterior objects; I think he expresses your opinion, Caroline, in other words.

Henrietta.

I likewise notice this similarity of sentiment in the part you mention, and more particularly where
he

he adds, that the mind may be haunted with such ghastly spectres and apparitions as would make us hope for annihilation.

Caroline.

I flatter myself then this will in some measure strengthen my arguments on that subject; and that you will in future find it more agreeable to your own reason to suppose that the imagination is imposed upon, rather than that the dead are dragged to earth to act a part which cannot fail to excite terror and disgust.

But pray, master Edwin, what said his relation to this?

Edwin.

He said he saw my tutor's kindness, and the boy's misfortune in planting those terrors and melancholy reflections in his own mind, which Providence never designed any of his creatures to suffer from foolish superstition.

Caroline.

Yet the youth is to be permitted to go on in his folly, is he not?

Edwin.

No, madam, they intend to appeal to his senses, and to bring him by degrees to reflect upon the folly and injustice of this way of thinking.

Caro-

Caroline.

Pray, by what means?

Edwin.

Mr. L— and the gentleman I mentioned, as master Williamson's relation, have engaged me to present him with an extract from the Parental Monitor, which they wish him to read with attention. I am therefore requested to leave it with him, and to desire him to give me his opinion of it.

Caroline.

I very much approve of their plan; and if you read Mr. Locke's remarks on the Association of Ideas, you will see the necessity of breaking this chain of ideas, that enslaves the mind, and is unfortunately linked together by the prejudice of education. He gives, among other instances which I shall not trouble you with, one which I think very applicable to master Williamson's situation.

Edwin.

By what I have heard of that great author, and the high estimation his works are held in, it seems likely he would not be mistaken on this subject.

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Caro-

Caroline.

He says, the ideas of goblins and sprights, have really no more to do with darkness than light ; yet, let but a foolish maid inculcate these often on the mind of a child, and raise them there together, possibly he shall never be able to separate them again so long as he lives : but darkness shall ever afterward bring with it those frightful ideas, and they shall be so joined that he can no more bear the one than the other.

Edwin.

This is immediately the case with poor Williamson ; and he suffers much from those foolish fears. But his relation says he is at present in a state that will not permit him to use his reason, it is so overpowered by fear ; yet he doubts not his fear will decrease in proportion to his reflection, on the groundless cause of this tormenting passion, which is frequently too strong for either reason or judgment instantly to subdue.

Caroline.

Then he looks upon this change of ideas as a work of time and reflection.

Edwin.

Yes, madam ; and Mr. L— is of the same opinion ;

nion ; for he says, that reason and judgment, which has been so long under the dominion of fear, must require some time to free them from the slavery they have permitted to overrule them. Besides, he says the habit of thinking, though absurd and erroneous, requires the aid of reflection to correct.

Matilda.

And does Mr. L— think the extract you mentioned from the Parental Monitor sufficient to convince master Williamson of his folly ?

Edwin.

He does not expect so much ; yet hopes he may by this means create in him a desire of information on his favourite subjects, and reflections that lead to an inquiry into the foundation of his fears, and thereby enable him to hear with less prejudice any argument against his present mode of thinking.

Henrietta.

Dear Caroline, do you not wish to see the piec—master Edwin speaks of ?

Caroline.

Yes, if he will be so kind as to oblige us with a sight of it, when he can make it convenient.

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Edwin.

Edwin.

It will give me much pleasure, ladies, to add to your amusement.

Henrietta.

You are very obliging, master Edwin, and I hope you will remember it.

Matilda.

Yes; when we next are favoured with your company, and the pleasure of meeting our dear Caroline, we will expect you thus to contribute to our entertainment.

Edwin.

You may rely upon my memory on this occasion.

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DIALOGUE VIII.

CAROLINE, MATILDA, HENRIETTA, AND
EDWIN.

Caroline.

AS we are again met, I must beg master Edwin to remind you of your promise.

Edwin.

I am glad it is in my power to oblige you, madam, having brought the extract with me, which is intended for master Williamfon.

Matilda.

I do not doubt our liking it; but if I did not, I should admire Mr. L— for being so kindly anxious to free the young gentleman from those

thoughts which must give him so much uneasiness.

Henrietta.

Yes, it is very good of Mr. L— to interest himself so much in favour of master Williamson.

Caroline.

Most certainly it is very kind, and if the youth will not pay attention to what is said, or what is copied for his instruction, he will merit his fate if made miserable by his obstinacy or ingratitude.

Edwin.

He cannot do this without at the same time remaining very ignorant.

Caroline.

And then, with this absurd way of thinking, how disagreeable he will make himself.

Edwin.

He will certainly then be avoided as a despicable character. But my tutor, unknown to him, intends to use every method in his power to prevent his being lost to the pleasures of society, as, he says, he will be if he continues to give ear to and believe in such torrents of nonsense.

Caro-

Caroline.

We will hope your worthy tutor's endeavours will meet with the success they merit from his good intention.

Edwin.

He says he trusts that he shall not be disappointed, as he thinks master Williamson has not a bad understanding, and he is of an amiable disposition. But here is the piece from the Parental Monitor.

SUPERSTITION.

Vainly we seek for true perfection here,

Its only lodgment far beyond the clouds;

Tho' pious, charitable, wise, sincere,

Error's black mist men's clearest reason shrouds.

MOZEEN.

'SUPERSTITION is the terror of weak, undiscerning and uneducated minds, and often produces numberless distresses, and many anxious thoughts to the ignorant and timid, while it is a fair subject for ridicule to the more wise and experienced.

The death-watch has kept many a one from partaking the balmy and refreshing sweets of repose, by impressing a thousand gloomy apprehensions upon the mind of the terrified listener, that the

most distressing events would certainly happen to themselves or families, from the portentous warning of this invisible tick ; while the death, of which it was the unimportant, but unwelcome harbinger, was, according to the most rational way of accounting for it, only that of a poor harmless fly ; whose faint efforts and fruitless struggles to defend its life (against its known enemy, the spider) occasioned an immortal being to tremble for their own.

‘ It has frequently been known, that a person who has been able to encounter many of the severest trials with the utmost fortitude and resolution, would not have ventured to pass through a churchyard at the awful midnight hour, even to have obtained an immediate release from a number of real distresses. This humiliating and troublesome weakness often takes its rise from the superstitious folly of those who have had the management of our infant years. The stories which are told by the ignorant nurse, to amuse and entertain their little charge, has often left an impression of fear and superstition on the mind, which neither time, good sense, or the united exertions of parental tenderness, or authority, could ever entirely eradicate. This dangerous weakness should therefore be unremittingly guarded against, by those who are intrusted with the care of youth, and every

every tendency to encourage its encroachments, resolutely combated by those of maturer years.

‘ Ghosts are, even in this enlightened age, the bugbear and terror of thousands, particularly among the lower ranks of people. No sooner has night overspread the heavens with her sable mantle, than this unaccountable dread, which had been driven from their minds by the cheerful light of day, returns with its accustomed force; and, if they are under the necessity of travelling through any unfrequented path, after the sun has withdrawn his rays, though the bright beams of the moon illumine their paths, they see an imaginary ghost in every tree, gate, or stile; and when they retire to their apartments by themselves, are in a continual dread, lest their curtains should be undrawn by the hand of some visible or invisible spectre; and the least noise, however easy to be accounted for by those happily devoid of fear, is, by the timorous and superstitious, supposed a warning from the grave, designed either for themselves or friends. — Thus the hours, which should be passed in undisturbed repose, in order to re-animate their frail nature with fresh vigour, to encounter the cares and business of the day, are rendered, by these weak, yet distressing apprehensions, the most wretched of their lives.

‘ There are a number of other mortifications which attend the superstitious, and which though

less terrific, are accompanied with anxiety. How provoking, yet how absurd and laughable, that the pleasures of a walk in the finest summer evening, should be interrupted by the unmeaning and simple croaking of a raven, that chanced to wing its flight over our heads!—A dinner spoiled by spilling a little salt!—A night's rest destroyed by the screeching of an owl, or because a coal flew from the fire in the fancied shape of a coffin, or a winding-sheet hung pendant with tremendous foldings from the candle!—while, perhaps, the very persons, thus easily and frivolously alarmed by the inventions of the ignorant and superstitious, can read an account in the public papers of an earthquake having depopulated a whole city, with less regret and terror than they can hear the simple and natural howling of a house-dog beneath their window. And many a fair bride has been gloomy in her bridal finery, and sad amid the gratulations of rejoicing friends, because the sun has not shone, upon her wedding-day: from which circumstance future misery has been predicted by that tormenting sybil, Superstition.

‘What a mortifying and degrading picture is the above of human folly! The real miseries of life are abundantly sufficient to put our fortitude to the test, without having recourse to evils which can only exist in a deceived and deluded imagination. Be well assured, that no one will ever rise
from

from their graves, to disturb the peace of those they have left behind them, and that, if we had nothing more to fear from ourselves, our passions, or our fellow mortals, than we have from any supernatural appearance, we might rest in any place, or in almost any part of the globe, in perfect security. If omens were permitted to warn us of our dissolution, or any impending evil, they would (it is presumed) be attended with more awful and alarming circumstances, than any of the above mentioned.

“Despise, then, resolutely contemn and disbelieve all these absurd and futile inventions: and let not a dream, which from the airy and unconfined excursions of the never-dying soul, may have tortured your sleeping fancy, distress your waking imagination, or for one invaluable moment, lessen your firm dependence on that all-powerful Being, who presides with watchful care over every creature he has formed.

“Ye, who are blessed with innocence, and unsullied purity, what can you have to fear from the peaceable and cold inhabitants of the grave? Even could they be permitted to re-visit their native earth, their visit could not be hostile or prejudicial to you. Happily for those who are gone before, and for us who are left behind, and have the great debt of nature still to pay, they find too secure and sound repose, to disturb the peace of their former

loved companions. Listen not, therefore, to the paltry contrivances of superstitious ignorance, even in the most trifling matters, thereby adding fictitious cares and inquietudes to the real troubles of a short and busy life. Sufficient are the unavoidable evils, which beset and incommode our weary pilgrimage, without increasing, by this inexcusable pufillanimity, the long and sad catalogue of human miseries.

Here ladies concludes this extract, which I hope has had your attention.

Caroline.

I can answer for the attention which we have all paid to this little piece; and for the reading of it we are much obliged to you master Edwin.

But pray Matilda what are your remarks upon it?

Edwin.

And yours, if you please, Henrietta?

Matilda.

I mark one circumstance more particularly as it has very much surprised me, I mean what is said of the death-watch.

Caroline.

But why surprise you?

Ma-

DIALOGUE VIII.

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Matilda.

Henrietta and myself have heard such accounts of the death-watch, and to us it has been described as so alarming an incident, that I cannot but own my astonishment at now hearing from the Parental Monitor that the noise distinguished by that appellation should be occasioned by a poor inoffensive fly, whose life, according to this account, was in danger from a spider.

Henrietta.

I have been equally surprised with Matilda ; but I think this must be a mistake. Surely, my dear Caroline, an innocent helpless fly could never create so many fears ? Do you think it possible it should ?

Caroline.

Let it arise from what cause it will, it seems to me certain it is too trifling to occasion any alarm ; and therefore the fears arising from it are only produced from an ignorance of that cause.

Henrietta.

Then you do not look upon it as the harbinger of death. We have heard it is, and on that account

count we should be very much afraid of that noise. Are not you ?

Caroline.

By no means ; for whatever may be the cause of that trifling noise which you have heard described as so very alarming, it is certain it does not arise from any thing that can have the least affinity, or connexion with the life or death of any human being.

Matilda.

What, Caroline, do you really think it is a fly which makes that noise ?

Caroline.

I must answer you this question in a future conversation ; as I must not differ in opinion without giving you my reasons for it.

DIA-

DIALOGUE IX.

CAROLINE, MATILDA, AND HENRIETTA.

Henrietta.

NOW, Caroline, for your answer to my question, Whether you think with the Parental Monitor, that the noise known by the name of a death-watch is occasioned by a fly.

Caroline.

Believe me, dear Henrietta, if I say it proceeds from a fly, or a spider, or both together, it is of little consequence, as they are equally matters of no importance to the life, death, or welfare of mankind.

Hen-

Henrietta.

But we wish to know your opinion, as we are anxious to be informed what that noise proceeds from?

Caroline.

I have already said that as I happen to differ in opinion from the Parental Monitor, I think it but just to give my reasons for this difference, which would need an apology was not my sentiments given with a view to your exercising your own abilities, and forming a judgment for yourselves respecting the cause of so much fear.

Matilda.

If you make it appear to be occasioned by a trifling insect, I shall be ashamed of the alarms I have had from so harmless a cause.

Henrietta.

What we one night suffered on account of that kind of noise must make us much laughed at for our unnecessary fears, and when we see their absurdity, I doubt not we shall laugh at such unmeaning incidents.

Caroline.

I much hope for this good effect of your conviction;

viction; and in order to enable you to form a judgment of your own, I shall tell you the facts simply as they occurred, and then leave you to form what opinion you please.

Matilda.

That we shall like better than the most probable conjectures of other people, for you know they may be mistaken.

Caroline.

And yet you are willing to receive, and believe, any account though ever so exaggerated by fear, notwithstanding that passion is so very little to be depended upon, that it never fails to impose upon the person subject to its power; and it is of that enslaving nature that it will not permit reason to operate while under its influence, and too many are unwilling to counteract that influence by the exertion of their reason and reflection.—But to the subject.

One evening, last winter, as we were sitting at a table in a well lighted room, the company rather cheerful than loud, a noise of this sort was heard; but as it was immediately like that of a watch, it is no wonder that it for some time passed for one.

The next evening, in the same room, it being
more

more still and the conversation in a lower key; perhaps, from its being more serious, the same kind of noise was much more perceptible and easy to trace. It then plainly appeared to proceed from the mantle-piece, or the wood work about it, near which no watch happened to be placed; this was proved, and occasioned a friend of ours present to observe that he had heard a noise like that was frequently made by a spider: but this was only conjecture, and every one present wished for some reason why they should think an insect was the occasion of those conjectures, and their unavoidable attention. He added, if it was occasioned by a spider, as he imagined, it would not continue long that noise, but we should observe it would stop soon; as it could not be supposed that it would, like a piece of mechanism, continue for hours without break or cessation; whereas, if a watch, it must either continue to beat, or show by a difference of time when it stopped, and whose watch it was that caused this deception.

No long trial of our patience proved necessary, for in a very short space of time the noise was suspended; and while we were engaged on the subject of its cause, we heard it again as distinct as before, and so it continued loud and distinct; yet not without frequent pauses. We were now all convinced it was not from any watch or other object exposed to the eye; but, on the contrary, that it was caused
by

by some creature or thing, which was hid from our sight by the wood, &c. through which we heard the sound. Being for some time silent, it was observed, that if a watch was held near the place from whence the noise proceeded, the insect would answer it, though quite silent at the time the watch was placed there. This was done repeatedly, and it as regularly answered, beginning immediately upon the application of the watch.

After this we were regularly visited for many evenings by this noise, and we were not a little entertained at its answering a watch, as we were never disappointed, though our applications were very frequent; which is no doubt a striking proof of the near resemblance this noise has to the beat of a watch, or the insect that makes it could not be thus deceived.

Henrietta.

Did you ever hear any other noise of that kind?

Caroline.

Yes, in the same room, at no great distance, and they seemed to answer one another.

Henrietta.

I am surprised that the noise should continue for several

several evenings in the same place. I fancy it could not remove or it would not have remained there.

Caroline.

It certainly was in or near the same place, for its removal was not to us perceptible.

Henrietta.

Then I think it could not possibly be any thing alive, or it would not have remained so long a time in the same situation.

Caroline.

To a small insect the situation might appear materially changed, though that change was to us imperceptible. I presume our conceptions of distance and space must be very opposite; as our sight, which is not intended for that minutia of object, is widely different, for the reason which Mr. Pope gives in these lines,

Why has not man a microscopic eye?

For this plain reason—man is not a fly.

Henrietta.

Pray Caroline, was the noise equally loud?

Caro-

Caroline.

Not always; but as loud when we last attended to it as at any time.

Henrietta.

Then it could not be a fly, for that must have been weaker and weaker.

Caroline.

Yes, and dead long before this noise ceased. And it would have been very extraordinary if another fly had been attacked by a spider in a situation equally imperceptible; indeed, so much so, that there was no possibility of tracing a way by which they could get behind the wood: a circumstance common to spiders, but by no means so with respect to flies.

Henrietta.

But do you think it was in pain or distress which occasioned that noise?

Caroline.

I must own I think it more reasonable to suppose it a sort of call one to another; and I am particularly led to this conclusion from their an-

I

swering

swering one another as I have informed you. But this is again only conjecture.

Matilda.

I wish we had heard this account sooner : it would have guarded us from many foolish apprehensions which have made us very miserable. But how do you think people ever got such things into their heads ?

Caroline.

How such thoughts were first raised is difficult to determine. But you may observe the ignorant nurse is blamed for helping to propagate those frightful ideas, as well as that kind of superstition to which the uninformed and vulgar are more particularly addicted, and which, I think, is agreeably ridiculed by Gay, in his fable entitled

THE FARMER'S WIFE AND THE RAVEN.

WHY are those tears ? why droops your head ?
Is then your other husband dead ?
Or does a worse disgrace betide ?
Has no one since his death apply'd ?

Alas ! you know the cause too well :
The salt is spilt, to me it fell.
And to contribute to my loss,
My knife and fork were laid across ;

On

DIALOGUE IX.

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On Friday too ! the day I dread !
 Would I were safe at home in bed !
 Last night (I vow to heav'n 'tis true)
 Bounce from the fire a coffin flew.
 Next post some fatal news shall tell,
 God send my Cornish friends be well !

Unhappy widow, cease thy tears,
 Nor feel affliction in thy fears.
 Let not thy stomach be suspended ;
 Eat now and weep when dinner's ended ;
 And when the butler clears the table,
 For thy desert, I'll read my fable.

Betwixt her swagging pannier's load
 A farmer's wife to market rode ;
 And, jogging on, with thoughtful care
 Summ'd up the profits of her ware ;
 When starting from her silver dream,
 Thus far and wide was heard her scream.

That raven on yon left hand oak
 (Curse on his ill-betiding croak)
 Bodes me no good. No more she said,
 When poor blind Ball, with stumbling tread,
 Fell prone ; o'erturn'd the pannier lay,
 And her mash'd eggs bestrow'd the way.

She sprawling in the yellow road,
 Rail'd, swore and curs'd. Thou croaking toad ;
 A murrain take thy whoreson throat !
 I knew misfortune in the note.

Dame, quoth the raven, spare your oaths,
 Unclench your fist, and wipe your cloaths.

Be

DIALOGUE IX,

But why on me those curses thrown?
 Goody, the fault was all your own:
 For had you laid this brittle ware,
 On Dun, the old sure-footed mare,
 Though all the ravens of the hundred,
 With croaking had your tongue out-thunder'd,
 Sure-footed Dun had kept her legs,
 And you, good woman, sav'd your eggs.

In the first part of this fable you will observe that superstition is well ridiculed, and the last shows the absurdity of attributing to other causes the bad effects of our own inattention: nay, we may carry the comparison still further, and see in it the folly of a too anxious care in the beginning of any pursuit, if followed by neglect in the end; for had the farmer's wife been careless in the packing it would have been more excusable, as she added that trouble, with the loss of her time and journey, to her misfortune.



F I N I S.

